

The USA's Continuing Role in Advancing the Northern Irish Peace Process:

The Northern Ireland Peace Process is the most successful and enduring anywhere in the world. It remains a process, rather than a moment in time, and we must all remain committed to sustaining it and be stakeholders in a great success. To this end, Irish-America and the Ireland Funds are now needed more than ever to engage with Northern Ireland and the Friends of Ireland to promote reconciliation and to protect the hard-won peace.

A stirring new film, narrated by Liam Neeson and scored by Bill Whelan (*Riverdance*), features frank interviews with Presidents Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter on why they followed the advice of Nobel Peace Prize winner John Hume to pursue peace in Ireland, despite opposition from the British government and their own advisers to balance the power equation in Ireland. Previous American Presidents had ignored the violence in Northern Ireland which exploded on American television screens in 1969. Yet a series of US presidents and congressmen saw Hume's approach as wholly credible—President Clinton refers to Hume in this film as ‘the Irish conflict's Martin Luther King’—and identified with him.

The film reminds people how monumental the achievement of the Peace Process was and it inspires people, through Hume's personal life and courage, that the core principles of non-violence, respect, jobs and equality must be promoted by America to end the persistent divisions in Northern Ireland. Senator George Mitchell, appointed by President Clinton to lead the historic peace negotiations in Belfast, describes the key role of the United States in fulfilling Hume's lifelong mission to pursue agreement between the warring parties.

We see how Hume worked closely with Irish-American political leaders and with members of the Ireland Funds, the largest Irish philanthropy organisation in the world, to mobilize generous donors to support peace in their homeland. The film shows Senator Ted Kennedy, at an Ireland Fund Dinner in 1977 in honor of Speaker Tip O'Neill, celebrating what would be a generational commitment by Irish-American political, community and business leaders to reconciliation between Catholic Irish Nationalists and Protestant British Unionists.

A full understanding of the peace process is essential to preserving the peace in Northern Ireland in the face of new challenges from Brexit. As Hume argues in the film: ‘The only way to solve the problems of Northern Ireland is not through conflict of the different sections of our people, but through partnership’.

The movie details how Senator Kennedy, Speaker Tip O'Neill and other senior Irish-American politicians provided courageous and unstinting support for peace and reconciliation in Ireland. As President Obama put it in 2016, ‘there are those here who fought long and hard to create peace in Northern Ireland and understand what happens when we start going into these dark places, the damage that can be done and how long it can take to unwind’.

This is the 20th anniversary of Hume and the Unionist leader David Trimble receiving the Nobel Peace Prize for the 1998 Good Friday Agreement which ended the killing in Northern Ireland. Twenty years later, Irish-Americans and Americans will justly take pride in their key role in this Agreement as beautifully and grippingly told in this remarkable movie.

The principles of peace, as articulated by John Hume and the leadership of Irish-America, can serve as a blueprint for the resolution of other conflict zones in today's world. They are a timely reminder to the people of Northern Ireland that peace and reconciliation must be constantly pursued. Equally, it is important for audiences in America to review the peace process since America will remain a partner to the ongoing mission for peace and stability in Northern Ireland.